



Quality and Leadership in Universities: Exploring the Links Between Institutional Academic Performance and the Appointment of Authorities in Peru

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Abstract

A decade ago, the enactment of the new University Law in Peru generated significant changes in quality assurance and university governance. This quantitative correlational study analyzes the relationship between the appointment of authorities (incumbent or interim) and institutional performance in the period 2015-2022 with administrative data. The results show an increasing trend in the designation of interim authorities, especially in deanships, vice-rectorates, and rectorates. These interim appointments, increasingly made for indefinite periods, could indicate a setback in the transparency of university management. Additionally, there is a positive correlation between the prevalence of interim authorities, institutional certification, and the academic productivity of faculty. This study underscores the importance of understanding the mechanisms that link university management with academic quality in order to improve the Peruvian university system.

KEYWORDS: LEADERSHIP, QUALITY, HIGHER EDUCATION, UNIVERSITY, PERU

Introduction

In Peru, the enactment of the new University Law (2014) generated profound changes in quality assurance and university governance. Institutional certification (licenciamiento) and the registration of authorities were established as new processes implemented by Sunedu¹, the new regulatory body for educational quality evaluation (Lavalle & De Nicolas, 2017; Bonifaz & Stuart, 2020).

A decade later, the Peruvian university system is significantly more aligned with international trends in measuring institutional performance through academic quality indicators and their continuous monitoring (Benites, 2021; van Damme, 2001). Despite this, in the midst of the plurality of university leadership forms, little is known about the link between university management practices and academic quality indicators (Dextre-Chacón et al., 2020; Chiyon et al., 2015).

Theoretical framework

The links between management, leadership, and academic quality are crucial for institutional effectiveness in universities (Middlehurst, 1995). The promotion of quality involves effective leadership that

clearly guides the organization in the face of changing and challenging scenarios, such as educational reforms or technological disruptions (Yielder & Codling, 2004; Köse & Korkmaz, 2019). The type of appointment of a university authority directly impacts its image, legitimacy, and ability to lead, which influences the effectiveness of its management on quality assurance (Horine & Hailey, 1995; Newton, 2002).

Specifically, the interim authority is called upon to maintain the organization until the arrival of an incumbent authority to the position; they are not expected to make substantive changes in the strategies or performance outcomes of the institution, so their management results tend to have significantly less impact (Rutherford, 2017).

Method

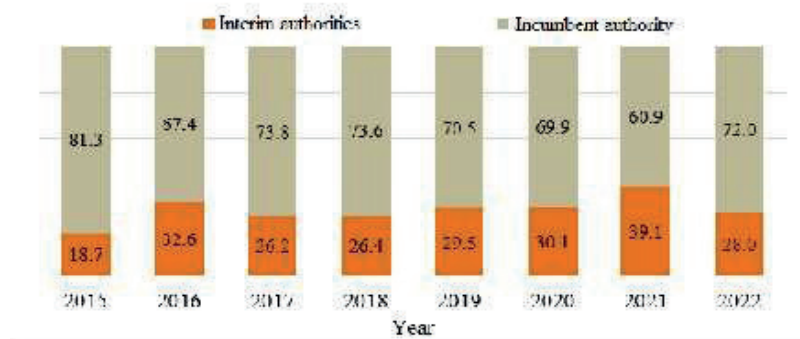
A quantitative methodology is employed, with a correlational scope using binary logistic regression (Agresti, 2012). The period analyzed was 2015-2022. The data come from two sources: 1) the Register of Authorities, an administrative database containing details on the designation of senior university authorities (N=9331).

The types of designation are classified as either incumbent or interim (in charge, encargado). 2) technical reports (Etesse, 2020; Sunedu, 2021) with information on the institutional performance of the all universities (N=141). The performance indicators include the attainment institutional certification in 2021, and the percentage of full-time faculty with indexed publications in Web of Science and/or Scopus (1980-2020) in 2020.

Results

The results show that the proportion of university interim authorities has fluctuated slightly but with an overall upward trend (Fig. 1). The proportion of commissioning increased from 19% to 28% in the analyzed period. Two peaks of increase are observed: 33% in 2016 and 39% in 2021.

Fig. 1. Peru: percentage of university authorities by type of designation, 2015-2022



This trend varies depending on the position held (Fig. 2). There has been a significant increase in the number of deans, vice-presidents, and presidents.

Throughout the period, this practice of appointing interim authorities mainly concerns deans: interim deans increased from 21% to 33%. For presidents and vice-presidents, the practice doubled, reaching at least 20% of interim authorities in office in 2022.

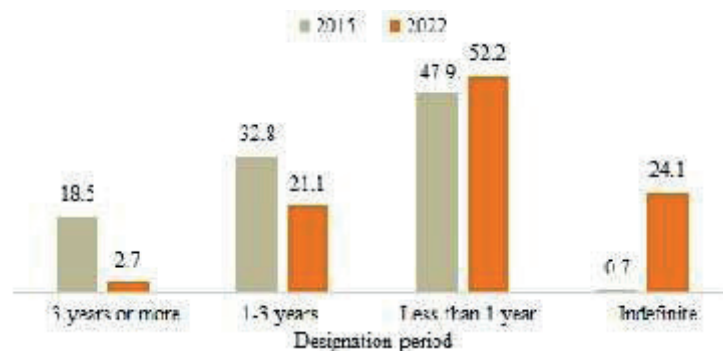
Fig. 2. Peru: percentage of university interim authorities by position, 2015/2022



The registry of interim authorities shows a change in the duration of appointments (Fig. 3). There is a decrease in appointments lasting one year or more, and a sharp increase in indefinite appointments, less than 1% to 24%.

This may indicate a change in the reporting practices of appointments and/or a decline in transparency in university management.

Fig. 3. Peru: percentage of university interim authorities, according to designation period, 2015/2022.



The measurement of the association between the prevalence of interim authorities and institutional certification (model 1) or academic productivity (model 2) is shown below (Fig. 4).

In the first case, it is evident that the presence of interim authorities is significantly and positively associated with obtaining institutional certification. In the period studied, institutions not certified were 1.59 times more likely to have interim authorities (compared to certified ones).

In the second case, it is shown that the prevalence of commissioned authorities is associated with faculty having a low publication record in indexed journals. Thus, a university with a low proportion of faculty with publications is 1.6 times more likely to have interim authorities (compared to universities with high productivity).

Fig. 4. Results of the models to measure the statistical association between type of authority designation and institutional performance indicators, 2015-2022.

Certification not obtained	1.585***	-
<i>ref.: Certification obtained</i>	(.058)	
Low % of professors with indexed publications (1st quartile)	-	1.596***
<i>ref.: High % of professors with indexed publications (4th quartile)</i>		(.066)
Control variables ^a	Sí	Sí
(Constant)	.531***	.479***
	(.109)	(.114)
Pseudo-R ¹	.324	.324
N	9331	9331

Discussion

We observed that the designation of interim authorities grew slightly during the period studied. This involved an increase of appointments in positions that are particularly sensitive within the academic environment. In particular, deans showed a significantly high prevalence: during 2022 it involved one third of them. This impacts the management of the academic quality in universities because leadership from the deanship is directly linked to academic quality in the faculties they lead: knowledge production, internationalization, inter-institutional cooperation, among others (Bonifaz & Stuart, 2020). Additionally, it has been observed that appointments are indefinite in duration, a practice of university management, which could be seen as a setback in transparency or towards informality (Etesse, 2020; Vargas, 2020). Finally, there is evidence of a positive correlation between the interim appointment of authorities, the university certification and the academic productivity of the teaching staff. This reinforces the importance of studying the mechanisms that link management and academic performance to ensure quality in the Peruvian university system (Benavides et al., 2024).

Conclusions

Despite the profound changes of the last decade in Peruvian universities, little is known about how university management and leadership practices are linked to academic quality. This research analyzed the relationship between the type of appointment of authorities (incumbent or interim) and institutional performance between 2015 and 2022. It becomes evident that there has been an increasing trend in the appointment of interim authorities with indefinite duration mainly in dean's office. Likewise, the results reveal a robust and positive correlation between type of authority designation, institutional certification and academic productivity.

Limitations and Future Research

The limitations of the study are associated with the academic quality indicators, as well as to the aggregation of positions and institutional profiles. Further research could be promising to deepen the analysis with the use of additional performance indicators (i.e. rankings) and conducting a specific analysis of positions (i.e. deans) and types of institutional management (i.e. public).

1 Odds ratios, statistical significance (**p<0.05, ***p<0.01), and standard deviation (in parentheses) are displayed. a Attributes of universities (natural region, total full-time professors and type of management) and designations (position, duration and year).

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